

Beginnings ~ January 23, 2011

Isaiah 9:1-4; I Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23; Psalm 27: 1, 4-9

I have often surprised myself by discovering that I have almost infinite patience with people—almost—while very little patience with machines. I am pretty good at figuring out human and mechanical problems but, when it comes to computers, I throw up my hands in despair and holler “Uncle” far before most people. During these past two weeks I have learned this about myself more clearly.

The thought has been circling around me for about two years that it might be a good thing to have high speed internet in the church office. That is a nice thought. I had resisted this suggestion for quite some time, but, as dial-up has become increasingly slow, and a small percentage of people still use this outmoded way of connecting to the world, and the price was definitely right, I thought it might be wise to give some sort of update a try. So, AT&T was contacted and a lovely box of components arrived at my door.

“It’s easy,” said the little instruction slip in the box. “Uh, huh,” I responded. But, knowing that dark thoughts can lead to gloomy outcomes in life, I pretended to think that it would be “easy.”

So, here I am, 2 weeks into a process that should have taken an hour and a half at most and I am still not connected. Not relying on myself alone, I spent a good hour plus with a service tech in California and Debi McKeon spent an additional 2 hours plus with one in Detroit, to no avail. We were fortunate that we did not make contact with “Peggy” in Calcutta. When asked if there was any place this system did not work, the answer was “It works everywhere.” Uh, huh. Well, maybe not in Colebrook where the men are all handsome and the women are all smart and the children are all above average. AT&T has checked the lines and the computer and said, “Everything is fine.” I am saying, “Uh, huh, there is some component here that is not working in sync with the others.” There can be no new beginning until it is figured out. I will learn more tomorrow when I next spend hours conversing with another tech.

Poor Paul. The church in Corinth was notoriously difficult. The members could not get in sync with one another—even when it came to discussing their baptisms. They couldn’t quite grasp that one baptism was not better than another. They were allowing things that mattered the least to overcome those things that mattered the most.

They were not gathered together to spend their time on such ridiculous matters. All of their bickering would never help them accomplish the goal set before them—that of spreading the gospel and furthering the mission of Christ. If they could not agree on tiny matters there would be no way to begin to move along the pathway set before them. If the components were not all working together, there could be no lasting connection. They needed to set aside their differences to regain a focus on what it was that they had in common and what it was that united them and made them strong.

The same kind of nit-picking that went on in the Corinth church often pops up in churches that are gathered from diverse people with differing backgrounds and different ideas of how to get things done. Egos get in the way and bump into each other causing the focus on what needs to be done to be shifted away to individual needs and wants. A

lot of give and take is required for things to begin to run smoothly and then there will still always be little flare-ups when there are differences of opinion.

The church in Corinth was a place where flare-ups were more the rule than the exception. While we have two letters to that church in our Bible, there were quite possibly four. Paul had to work hard to try and keep that little church on task.

Jesus had a far easier time hand picking those who would follow him and embrace the mission set before them. They were simple fishermen who found something special in this man who asked them to follow him so that they might become fishers-of-men. Some were brothers, and almost all came from the same region. If they were religious at all, they probably were Jewish and adhered to a basic set of beliefs. The task of creating a cohesive body of followers is always easier when the followers share similar backgrounds and interests. There were arguments among the disciples as time went on, but they seem to have been settled with a minimum of disruption. They were able to keep their focus where it belonged as they were taught “the new way” Jesus shared with them. They became the cornerstones of this new religion and managed to hold on to what mattered the most enabling us to be here this morning.

When I reflect on my struggle with my computer for the past days, I know that I really cannot allow something that matters so little in the realm of the world to push aside those things that matter the most. In the next few weeks we will be walking through the Sermon on the Mount, and, as I read those timeless words, the message of what it is that matters the most became crystal clear and calmed my jangled nerves and mind. I thought of those fishermen and the wonderful advantage they had having Jesus in their midst to help them guide their lives and to help open the doors to a closer relationship with God and with one another. And, I knew, that through the words that we have for us in the pages of our Bible and through the action of the Holy Spirit, we, too have the presence of Christ in our lives, we need only awaken to those things that matter the most and set aside all others.

-- Amen